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[EXTERNAL] Drilling in the Arctic Refuge

1 message

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There are no justifiable reasons that we must drill for oil in America's last truly wild place, the Arctic Refuge.

Currently the oil and gas industry has a massive surplus of oil and gas leases and permits. Less than half of federal acreage under lease is currently producing. Last year, industry bid on just 7 percent of federal acreage offered for lease at auction — the lowest share ever over the past decade.

The most promising oil plays are still in the Lower 48, primarily on state and private lands, where fracking has unlocked resources that have enabled us to cut our dependence on foreign oil. Any economist would tell you that adding to the glut of supply at this time just doesn't make good business sense.

Alaska's U.S. Sen. Murkowski is responsible for adding a provision for an expedited leasing process into last year's tax package, ensuring that debate of the proposal was muted and that it could squeak by with only 50 votes, instead of the 60 usually required. This reversed nearly six decades of bipartisan efforts in Congress to protect the Arctic Refuge — first to establish it in 1960, and then to periodically beat back attempts to undermine its safeguards. Her actions also undermined the interests of Alaska Native communities who rely on the refuge for subsistence and cultural practices.

Sen. Murkowski justified her budget rider by claiming that the oil and gas development would send \$1 billion to the U.S. Treasury over 10 years. Recent and historical lease-sale data from other places on Alaska's North Slope suggests that number would be closer to \$50 million. Last year's sale of more than 10 million acres in the U.S.'s National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska — perhaps the best indicator we have of industry's interest in the North Slope — brought in bids on less than one percent of the acres offered and generated just over \$1 million.

The most concerning claim of all is that the drilling can be done safely, without harm to the surrounding environment. The refuge's coastal plain, where development would take place, is teeming with wildlife — critical calving grounds to caribou, denning habitat for polar bears and home to more than 200 species of migratory birds.

We know from experience that the web of roads, requisite infrastructure and inevitable spills would cause irrevocable damage to one of the most sensitive and pristine places ON THE PLANET. This is the conclusion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reached in 2015 after a multiyear review that included more than a million public comments, including from scientists, biologists and Alaska Native communities.

We should not be a nation that trades away our children's future for reckless, shortsighted political gimmicks. We are better than this. Or we used to be.